

TRUANCY AND THE GEORGIA COMPULSORY SCHOOL ATTENDANCE LAW

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BY

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ABSTRACT

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TRUANCY AND THE GEORGIA COMPULSORY SCHOOL ATTENDANCE LAW

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Truancy has become a major problem for many schools in the United States. Many states have adopted truancy laws and programs to help combat this growing problem. The purpose of this study is to examine the impact of two interventions used to address attendance problems and to assess their effectiveness among elementary school truants. The sample population was taken from the System Administration Student Information (SASI) report of three elementary schools in the Atlanta Public School System. SASI reports from the 2002-2003 school year were compared to the SASI report of the 2003-2004 school year. The hypothesis that notifying parents of students with truancy during the 2002-2003 academic year, along with sending them a copy of the Georgia Compulsory Attendance Law, will have a positive effect on truant behaviors and attendance patterns during the 2003-2004 school year was supported by the findings.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I have ridden the shoulders of my **Mother** to arrive at my **Today**
I hold her hands as I test the strength of my legs to climb into my **Tomorrow**
-taken from an African Rites of Passage

First and foremost, I thank God for giving me the strength and endurance to complete the thesis process. I thank all those who supported me throughout all of my educational ups and downs for providing me much needed praise and reassurance. I would also like to thank the “village” that it took to raise this child; I could not have made it without you all. To my thesis advisor Dr. Margaret Counts-Spriggs, I thank you for being a woman who can wear many hats. You have gone out of your way to make yourself available as a professor, advisor, mentor, and most of all a role model. You exude inner strength, which allows everyone around you to be strong. For that, I thank you. Lastly, I must thank my mother, who has supported me in ways that only she could. I thank you for believing in me, for trusting in me, and for loving me.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter describes the purpose of this study, the background, statement of the problem, and the significance of the study. It also includes an overview of the study's goals and closes with a brief description of the chapters that follow.

Background of the Problem

Truancy is not a new problem in the United States. In her article, "Empty Places," Susan Black cites Doug Rhorman as saying, "truancy concerns by school officials go back as far as 1872" (as cited in Bernstein & King, 2001). In 1980, a national survey reported that at least 800,000 students in the United Kingdom were absent from school without "just cause" (Sentelle, 1980). In 1993, the National Association of Social Workers in Education conducted a similar survey in the United States. The results suggested that at least a half million children were truant every day (Walls, 2003).

School absences occur for a number of reasons, from personal illness and family crisis to child neglect and blatant "skipping"—not attending without the permission of parents. The problem with most truants is not the absence itself, but the lack of a

valid excuse for the absence.

In the past, school officials and lawmakers across the United States tried many tactics to crack down on kids who were truant—from taking away student's driver's licenses to sending police to round up kids from local shopping malls. Nothing seemed to work, because truancy rates across the country have not declined. School officials hope that getting in touch with parents of kids who skip school will help to decrease the truancy rate. ("Punishing Parents," 2000, p. 2)

This ongoing problem led to the Compulsory Attendance Law of August 19, 1916. The Compulsory Attendance Law holds parents responsible when their children do not attend school. This law gives schools the option to file a case in juvenile court against the parent and the student with excessive unexcused absences ("Punishing Parents," 2000).

Statement of the Problem

Truancy is the failure to adhere to attendance codes and the failure to attend school regularly without parental consent.

Absenteeism often occurs in high numbers due to chronic illnesses and family crises, but these absences are not what is the most concern to school systems. Unexcused absences are the core of the problem being addressed not only nationally, but also in other countries that have compulsory school attendance laws. Unexcused absences often fall under the term truancy. ("Raising School Attendance," 2002, p. 56)

Truancy during elementary school years may have adverse effects on students, schools, and society. Students with the highest truancy rates tend to show low academic achievement, which increases the likelihood that they may become dropouts (Bernstein & King, 2001). "Students who attend school have more opportunities to achieve academically as compared to non-attending students and studies show that school absence is associated with poor academic achievement" (Fantuzzo, Grim, & Hazan, 2001). "Truancy has been labeled one of the top ten major problems in this country's [America] schools, negatively affecting the future of our youth. In fact, absentee rates have reached as high as 30 percent in some cities" (Dekalb, 1995). According to Gullatt and Lemoine (1997), 10 percent to 19 percent of school children are truant on any given school day and the truancy rate increases 33 percent on any given Monday. When students do not attend school, they risk missing important information that may be beneficial to them academically, which in turn makes them more susceptible to earning failing grades and becoming dropouts. Most states require students to attend school until the age of 16. All states have laws governing compulsory education and noncompliance results in penalties for the parent(s) or guardian(s) of the truant student ("Truancy," 1998). If a truant is referred to a juvenile court, the parent will be subject to a fine and may face time in jail as a result of their child's behavior ("Punishing Parents," 2000). This study will examine System Administration Student Information (SASI) reports and letters to parents regarding their children absences to evaluate ways used to deter students from becoming truants.

Significance of the Study

The findings of the study show that interventions to inform parents that their child's attendance is becoming a problem are beneficial to the child's school performance. From much of the literature, it is evident that truancy is a problem that affects many schools throughout the United States. This study will examine whether the intervention of sending letters home to parents will impact their children's attendance by reducing truancy in schools.

Purpose of the Study

This study seeks to determine whether notifying parents of students with truancy during the 2002-2003 academic year, along with sending them a copy of the Georgia Compulsory Attendance Law, will have a positive effect on truant behaviors and attendance patterns during the 2003-2004 school year. Contributing factors to non-attendance will also be assessed. For this study, two variables were measured: (a) the number of absences of truants before a student was referred to the school social worker; and (b) the number of absences after parents were sent a copy of the Georgia Compulsory Attendance Law. The Georgia Compulsory Attendance Law is the dependent variable and the number of absences is the independent variable in the study.

Chapter two of this study provides an overview of the existing empirical research on this topic, as well as the limitations. The third chapter describes in depth this study's hypothesis and its conceptual framework. Chapter four describes the setting, sample, measures, research design, procedure, and data analysis. Chapter five presents the findings using both graphs and tables. Finally, the sixth chapter discusses the implications of the study's findings.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This section describes, in specific detail, the review of the literature for this study. The section includes compulsory education, reasons for non-attendance, interventions, the role of the school social worker, and the No Child Left Behind Act.

Compulsory Education

Rhode Island was the first state to pass a compulsory education law in 1840. The Compulsory Attendance Act of 1852 enacted by the state of Massachusetts was the second. The law included mandatory attendance for children between the ages of 8 and 14 for at least 3 months out of each year; of these 12 weeks, at least 6 had to be consecutive. By 1918, compulsory education laws were in place in all states (Ysseldyke & Algozzine, 1984). Georgia's Compulsory Attendance Law was approved on March 8, 1945 (Georgia Law, 1945).

In the 1840s, the growth of state-funded public education was blossoming in states from Connecticut to Illinois (Bernard & Burner, 1975). Southerners believed that education was a private matter and not a concern for the state (Bernard & Burner, 1975).

They were quick to point out that in all traditional societies the most important training a child receives is in the home, where he/she is inducted into the values of the society he/she is about to enter. There were planters (plantation owners) and there were slaves; no middle class existed in the South to bridge the gap between upper and lower classes. The reason that public education did not flourish in the South was that the population was more dispersed than it was in the North, making it difficult to find enough children in one area to justify a school (Bernard & Burner, 1975). However, there were Southerners who supported a public school system. Many of these supporters solicited advice and materials from Horace Mann, the first secretary of the first State Board of Education, created in Massachusetts in 1837. Mann also published a newsletter, "The Common School Journal," which provided information about the public school system to anyone expressing an interest in learning more about the Massachusetts experiment (Pruitt, 1987).

In 1945, Georgia introduced its Compulsory School Attendance Law, enacted by the General Assembly of the State of Georgia. It states:

Georgia's Compulsory School Attendance

32-2101, 32-2102, 32-2103, 32-9906
No. 350

An act to provide for the compulsory school attendance of all children within the State of Georgia between their seventh and sixteenth birthdays; to provide the minimum session of such annual school attendance, and the exceptions there from; to provide for the

enforcement of such attendance laws by authorized county and independent school system boards of education, to employ a full time visiting teacher or teachers, to be qualified in accordance with professional requirements as prescribed by the State Board of Education; to prescribe the powers, duties, and authority of such visiting teachers; to permit the employment of part-time visiting teachers; to permit the employment of other persons to act as attendance officers in lieu of visiting teachers; to require certain reports from public, private, parochial and denominational teachers, schools, and principals; to provide the penalties for violation of the Act, and for the treatment of children absent from school as delinquents, in the Juvenile, Superior and City Courts; to provide that the unconstitutionality of any provision of this act shall not affect the constitutionality of any other provision thereof; to repeal all laws or parts of laws inconsistent or in conflict herewith, and to wholly repeals Sections 32-2101, 32-2102, 32-2103, and 32-9906 of the Georgia Laws relating to compulsory school attendance. (Georgia Law, 1945)

Based on the Georgia Compulsory School Attendance Act, The Atlanta Board of Educations Compulsory Attendance Policy states:

students are expected to be present and to arrive and depart on time in accordance with the provisions of the Georgia Compulsory Attendance

Law. Students who are absent or tardy miss valuable instruction time and other important school activities. Chronic tardiness and absence from school result in a student being less likely to master those skills, concepts, and principles needed to be successful in life and to achieve on his/her respective grade level. Also, absenteeism and tardiness are disruptive to the "teaching-learning" process. (Truancy retention, 2001, p. 1)

Reporting absences to parents/guardians in a timely manner is important when working with attendance issues. A lack of communication between schools and parents as well as inconsistent reporting of attendance allows truant students to go undetected for extended periods of time. It is crucial that attendance issues be reported promptly to families and appropriate school personnel in order for a plan of action to be developed.

Reasons for Nonattendance

For some children, school is so emotionally distressing that they have difficulty attending on a regular basis, a problem that often results in prolonged absences from school (as cited in Bernstein & King, 2001, p. 198). However, this may not be the case for all truants. Failure to comprehend class work, boredom, and an overall lack of interest in coursework are all precursors to truancy. In other cases, young children stay home involuntarily to watch preschool brothers and sisters because of drug abusing

parents. Sometimes, drug-addicted parents simply fail to get young children out of bed for school (Stack, 2002). Drug abuse, school violence, lack of importance placed on education within the family, and emotional or mental health problems also contribute to truancy.

Attendance is a low priority for a student who fears for his/her safety. Providing a safe school environment is crucial to improve the attendance of students being threatened and bullied either at school or while traveling to and from school.

Parents who choose to teach their children at home have traditionally done so for religious reasons. But a growing number of home-schooling parents now have reasons for taking education into their own hands. Traditionally, home schooling has been branded as a fringe activity—the domain of Bible-toting parents and off-the-grid hippies. The most vocal home-schoolers—and best organized politically—have tended to be the religiously motivated, often conservative Christians (Hurst, 2003).

School refusal is a problem that is stressful for children, families, and school personnel. Failing to attend school has significant short- and long-term effects on children's social, emotional, and educational development. School refusal often is associated with co-morbid psychiatric disorders such as anxiety and depression. It is important to identify problems early and to provide appropriate interventions to prevent further difficulties. The onset of school refusal symptoms usually is gradual. Symptoms may begin after a holiday or illness. Some children have trouble going back to school after weekends or vacations. Stressful events at home or school or with peers may cause

school refusal. Some children leave home in the morning and develop difficulties as they get closer to school, then are unable to proceed. Other children refuse to make any effort to go to school (Rayner & Riding, 1996).

Many clinicians and researchers define school refusal as difficulty attending school associated with emotional distress, especially anxiety and depression (Bernstein, 2001). School refusal is often associated with short-term separations including poor academic performance, family difficulties, and peer relationship problems (as cited in Bernstein & King, 2001, p. 199). In relation to educational outcomes, some researchers estimate that about half of school refusers underachieve academically (as cited in Bernstein & King, 2001, p. 202). Clearly, school refusal interferes with the child's social and educational development (as cited in Bernstein & King, 2001, p. 202). Recent reviewers have concluded that school refusal occurs in approximately 5 percent of all school-age children, although the rates of school absenteeism are much higher in some urban areas. Most studies suggest that school refusal tends to be equally common in boys and girls. Ollendick and Mayer (1984) concluded that school refusal is more likely to occur between 5 and 6 years and 10 and 11 years of age (Bernstein & King, 2001).

Interventions

School districts need to make it clear that parents are ultimately responsible for their truant children. School officials should establish partnerships with local police, probation officers, and juvenile and family court officials to deter youth from skipping school. Given the wide array of contributing factors, many schools are developing programs that meet the unique needs of each student. These programs include tutoring, added security measures, school breakfast and lunch programs, drug prevention initiatives, mentorship efforts through community and religious groups, and referrals to social service agencies (Gullat & Lemoine, 1997). Some schools use a system of incentives and rewards as a means to encourage students to attend school, while others seek out parental involvement. Some examples of why teachers used methods to improve attendance were given in the *National Education Association Today* online publication ("How Do You Improve," 2001). Briana Johnson, a high school biology teacher from Columbus, Ohio, stated:

My students use a time clock to track their attendance. I still take attendance in my own record book, but students enjoy clocking in and out of class as though it were a job. Timecards are totaled every two weeks, and, based on their attendance, students can earn up to 50 points toward their grade, and I use the clock to monitor hall pass use, too.

If you're wondering how I could afford a time clock, I couldn't. I wrote about 25 companies that sell them and asked for a donation. Two companies thought my idea was great and sent me one. I gave the extra to another teacher and now we both use them (How do you improve, 2001, p. 25).

A second grade teacher, Shannon Tousignant from Fontana, California, states that she uses another method for her students:

Since I started teaching four years ago, the best solution I've found is a pizza chart. I post a chart of an empty pizza pan. Each day that every student in class comes to school on time, the class earns one piece of pizza. Although we don't often have these perfect, on-time days, attendance has improved. Each time the class receives a piece of pizza on the chart, the students cheer out loud and are eager to come to school on time for the rest of the week. When all eight pieces are filled, we have a pizza party. I've found a local pizza place that gives us a great deal, since we're a school (How do you improve, 2001, p. 26).

An Elementary ESOL teacher from Dalton, Georgia, Marie Varela stated:

When students are absent, I make sure and greet them with a "missed you yesterday!" when they return. I'll detain a student after class for a brief moment to ask specifically why the student was absent. Sometimes I then call home to check on a dubious answer. Students don't like to be checked on, parents don't

like to be bothered at home or at work, yet everyone appreciates the interest I've taken in the student. It works for me! My students usually have very low absenteeism. Of course, a low pupil/teacher ratio allows me to get involved in ways that regular classroom teachers might find impossible to do. If everyone had smaller class sizes, attendance would improve. (How do you improve, 2001, p. 26)

Reporting to parents the child's absences in a timely manner is important. Lack of communication between school and parents as well as inconsistent reporting of attendance allows truant students to go undetected for extended periods of time. It is important for attendance issues to be reported promptly to families and appropriate school personnel in order for a plan of action to be developed. If truancy persists, students may even be withdrawn from school.

The Role of the School Social Worker

School social work began during the school year 1906-07 simultaneously in New York, Boston, Hartford, and Chicago. The purpose was to work with communities of new immigrants promoting understanding and communication (Constable, McDonald, & Flynn, 2002).

School social workers work with young people and with their school and family environments. They assist them with tasks associated with their learning, growth, and development, and thus to come to a fuller realization of their intrinsic dignity, capability,

and potential. The basic focus of the school social worker is the interrelationship of teacher, parent, and child. The social worker must be able to relate to and work with all aspects of the child's situation, but the basic skill underlying all of this is assessment; a systemic way of understanding and communicating what is happening and what is possible. Building on assessment, the social worker develops a plan to assist the teacher, student, parents, and others to work together to support the child in the successful completion of the developmental steps that lie ahead (Constable et al., 2002).

No Child Left Behind Act of 2001

The No Child Left Behind Act (Public Law 107-110, enacted January 8, 2002) represents changes to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) since it was enacted in 1965. In accordance with Georgia law, every parent, guardian, or other person residing within the City of Atlanta and having control or charge of any child between his/her sixth and sixteenth birthdays shall enroll and send a child to a public school, private school, or a home study program. The intent of the law is to ensure that all schools and districts are held accountable for student achievement. The programs authorized by Title I of the ESEA, as reauthorized by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, have as their goal the education of all students, including students who are economically disadvantaged, limited English proficient, disabled, migratory, residing in institutions for neglected or delinquent youth and adults, or members of other groups typically considered "at risk," so that they can achieve challenging content and academic

achievement standards. Thus, the benefits that will be obtained through the reauthorized Title I and its implementing regulations are primarily a more educated society. National data sets and studies by prominent researchers have demonstrated repeatedly that better education has major benefits, both economic and non-economic, not only for the individuals who receive it but for society as a whole. Nations that invest in quality education enjoy higher levels of growth and productivity, and a high-quality education system is an indispensable element of a strong economy and successful civil society (Title I, 2002).

In 1998, Southern California law changed, and the state began withholding aid when students missed school (Hurst, 2003). The Los Alamitos Unified School District, which lost \$1.1 million in state funding during the 2001-2002 school year as a result of student absences, is asking their parents to voluntarily pay \$40 each day a child is absent for non-illness-related reasons. Nearly 80 percent of the district's funding comes from state payments that are based on average daily student attendance. State funding helps pay for textbooks, instructional materials, teacher salaries, and other classroom expenses. The state allowed schools to receive funding for most excused absences, such as doctor appointments and student vacations.

Limitations of the Literature

The limitations of previous research as related to the purpose of this study can be summarized into the following areas of weakness. Many states have different rules and regulations listed in their Compulsory Attendance Laws related to what is considered excused or unexcused absences. Statewide statistics and attendance reporting procedures tend to vary in the frequency of collections. For example, statewide statistics of Georgia's absenteeism (truancy) are not collected; they are instead collected by each system and reporting is not required at the state level. Other states, however, have more clearly defined what absence is and have documented the extent of the problem ("Raising School Attendance," 2002). This makes it difficult to make a generalization about the problem of attendance as it pertains to the United States collectively. Another limitation to the literature was the lack of understanding the importance of coming to school and students withdrawing from school. The literature failed to mention alternative explanations for a change in behavior (i.e., duration of time, relocation, new friends) that may affect a student's attendance patterns. Nor did it mention that race was a factor of attendance or nonattendance of students. Researches using longitudinal studies were scarce.

Some strengths within the literature were that the research offered clear and concise definitions about what was considered reasons for absences, gave reference to other methods of intervention used, and gave statistics on the effectiveness of all interventions mentioned.

Although the different studies presented a wide array of ideas, most of them were in agreement that being absent is posing a serious problem for youth, schools, and communities at large.

CHAPTER III

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Chapter three discusses the theoretical framework for exploring truancy issues. It is important that learning theory is incorporated. The statement of the research question and hypothesis are also presented.

Learning theory is a theoretical orientation that conceptualizes the social environment in terms of behaviors, their preceding events, and their subsequent consequences (Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman, 2001). The theory poses that behavior can be learned and, therefore, maladaptive behavior can be unlearned. Learning theory provides a framework for understanding how behavior develops; it emphasizes the social functioning of persons in their environments. Learning theory emphasizes the importance of assessing observable behaviors and provides a positive approach. It also stresses the use of behaviorally specific terms in defining behaviors (Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman, 2001). The underlying idea is that behaviors develop through learning them, and, therefore, undesirable behaviors can be unlearned.

Operant conditioning is one of the dominant types of learning focused on in the United States (Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman, 2001). Operant conditioning is "a type of learning in which behaviors are altered primarily by regulating the consequences which follow them" (as cited in Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman, 2001, p. 159). The emphasis

lies on the consequences of behavior. What follows a particular behavior affects how frequently that behavior will occur (Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman, 2001).

In order to understand the effectiveness of sending letters of noncompliance home to parents whose child has three or more unexcused absences, it was necessary to integrate a punishment that the parents will be fined. Punishment is the presentation of an aversive event or the removal of a positive reinforcer, which results in the decrease in frequency of a particular behavior. For this study the result of punishment is the decrease in a behavior's frequency.

Statement of Research Question and Hypothesis

The research question states: Will sending the Georgia Compulsory Attendance Law home to parents help to improve students' attendance?

The hypothesis of this study is:

H1: There will be a decrease in the number of absences of a student who was referred in 2002-2003 and received a letter of noncompliance and a copy of the Georgia Compulsory Attendance Law.

This chapter gave an overview of learning theory for school refusal as the theoretical framework for this study. It also stated the research question and the hypothesis. The following chapter will provide an in-depth look at the methodology applied to this study.

CHAPTER IV

METHODOLOGY

This section describes, in specific detail, the methods that were used to conduct this study. The methodology includes a discussion of the setting, sample, measure, design, procedures, and the statistical analysis that was used in the study.

Data Collection

The data for this study were collected using the Atlanta Public School Social Worker Referral Form (1997), System Administration Student Information (SASI) reports 2002-2003, the Georgia Compulsory Attendance Law, and letters to parents notifying them of their child's attendance. The social worker referral form was used by teachers to refer truant students to the school social worker and the SASI reports to document number of days absent. Students are allowed to miss 10 days during the school year. When students miss 3 days due to unexcused absences, they are referred to the school social worker. The referral forms were used by the researcher to aid in the selection of the participants. The SASI reports were used to tally the days absent.

There are factors that may affect the validity and reliability of the research. Understanding the importance of the students coming to school, translation due to

parents' language barriers, and researcher bias are all plausible threats to validity. To ensure reliability of the data collection, letters were translated into Spanish to fit the need of the parent. The construct validity may be affected by the perceived threat of the researcher having an influence on the consequences for attendance.

Sample

The sample population, were selected from a large urban school system. This large urban school system was used because it offers a diverse student population, both ethnically (African-American, Hispanic, Caucasian) and in gender. The setting for the data collection took place in the social workers' offices at three schools. The school social worker receives referrals of absentees from the teacher once a child has 3 or more unexcused absences. Three elementary schools were identified where the sample population consisted of 1,100 students. The target group consisted of 90 students referred to the social worker during the 2002-2003 year for being truant. The sampling frame provided the necessary attributes desired of participants. The students ranged from K to 5 and attended one of the three schools. Their parents received a letter of noncompliance and copy of the Georgia Compulsory School Attendance Law (see Appendix C) at the beginning of the 2003-2004 academic year.

Measure

It is the legal responsibility of the school to document attendance (days absent and days present) of every child. A list of the 90 students K to 5 was presented to the staff at a faculty meeting. A memo was sent to the teachers of these students requesting them to monitor the attendance patterns. Teachers were asked to complete a social work referral on students with three or more unexcused absences beginning August through November of the 2003-2004 school year. For students who had three or more unexcused absences for the 2003-2004 school year, and during the 2002 –2003 school year, an educational neglect petition will be filed April 2004. Students who have successfully completed the 2003-2004 school year with perfect attendance and/or improved attendance will be recognized at the end of the school year.

Design

This study is a descriptive analysis design. It is imperative that this information is gathered to lay the foundation for further study. The design is appropriate because descriptive analysis summarizes the actual measurement of variables within a data set (Yegidis & Weinbach, 2002). The design notation for this study is: X O where X equals the number of unexcused days absent. The O equals the letter of noncompliance to the parent and the Georgia Compulsory Attendance Law.

The internal validity of this design may be threatened by the fact that the variables other than those tested within the parameters of this study, may contribute to the change in the frequency of truancy among students.

Procedure

A research proposal was developed and sent to the Atlanta Public School's Research Planning and Accountability Department for approval. Within 30 days, approval was gained from the Atlanta Public School's Research Planning and Accountability Department. The researcher contacted school principals of three and a copy of the approval letter from the Department was presented; within weeks approval was given to begin the data collection process.

The data collection process began on August 29, 2003. Each student's SASI report was pulled to calculate the number of absences during August, September, October, and November of the 2002-2003 school year. The researcher mailed letters to parents in August 2003 regarding their child's attendance during the 2002-2003 school year. The Georgia Compulsory Attendance Law (2001) states the following:

Every parent, guardian, or other person residing within the state having control or charge of any child or children between their seventh and sixteenth birthdays shall enroll and send such child or children to a public school, private school, or a home study program. Any parent or guardian who fails to enroll and send his/her child to one of the three

alternative educational programs specified above shall, upon conviction, be guilty of a misdemeanor. These individuals will be subject to a fine not to exceed \$100.00 or imprisonment not to exceed 30 days or both, at the discretion of the court having jurisdiction. Each day's absence from school in violation of this CODE SECTION shall constitute a separate offense. (Georgia Compulsory Attendance Law, 2001)

Laws such as the Georgia Compulsory Attendance Law are aimed to help parents keep students in school.

The researcher then began to calculate the number of days students had been absent in 2002-2003. Those students with three or more absences in 2002-2003 were monitored August, September, October, and November in the 2003-2004 school year via the SASI reports to keep an accurate calculation of days absent. The researcher completed data collection on November 25, 2003.

The limitation of collecting data from SASI reports is the possibility of human error and the inaccuracy of the documentation of the teachers.

Statistical Analysis

This study explores the effectiveness of sending a letter of noncompliance and a copy of the Georgia Compulsory School Attendance Law. The independent variable was the Georgia Compulsory School Attendance Law with letter of noncompliance to parents

and the dependent variable was the number of student absences. The hypothesis states that letters of noncompliance to parents regarding student attendance and a copy of the Georgia Compulsory Attendance Law will have an effect on the number of student absences in 2003-2004. The demographic information was analyzed using frequencies and descriptive statistics. All analysis were done using the SPSS-PC statistical package.

This chapter provided a discussion of the setting and sample. It also provided an in-depth description of the tools of measurement, the type of design notation, procedures of the study, and the analysis of the data collected. The next chapter presents the study's findings. For this research, tables and graphs were chosen to portray what was included in the frequency and descriptive analysis.

CHAPTER V

PRESENTATIONS OF FINDINGS

This chapter presents the findings of this study in two sections. The first section includes the demographics of the participants. The second section contains the monthly absences before intervention and monthly absences after intervention.

Demographics

All 90 of the participants were students at one of the three large urban schools. Fifty-one participants were African- American, 27 were Caucasian, and 7 were Latino. As specified in the methodology, all of the participants were in kindergarten to fifth grades and were between the ages of 5 and 11. Specifically, 8 participants were 5 years old, 16 were 6 years old, 14 were 7 years old, 18 were 8 years old, 18 were 9 years old, 8 were 10 years old, and 8 was 11 years of age.

There were 8 kindergarteners, 16 first graders, 16 second graders, 20 third graders, 14 fourth graders, and 16 fifth graders. This information were included in the analysis of the demographics information and coded to maintain confidentiality. This information is included in Table 1.

Table 1

Demographic Information (N=90)

Variable	Number	Frequency (%)
Age	90	100
5	8	8.9
6	16	17.8
7	14	15.6
8	18	20.0
9	18	20.0
10	8	8.9
11	8	8.9
Gender	90	100
Boys	45	50.0
Girls	45	50.0
Race	90	100
African- American	51	56.7
Caucasian	27	30.0
Latino	12	13.3
Grade Level	90	100
K	8	8.9
First	16	17.8
Second	16	17.8
Third	20	22.2
Fourth	14	15.6
Fifth	16	17.8

Figure 1 shows that before letters of noncompliance were sent home to parents with a copy of the Georgia Compulsory Attendance Law, on average in 2002 students missed 11 days in August, 14 days in September, 17 days in October, and 14 days in November.

In August, kindergarteners missed 4 days, first graders missed 13 days, second graders missed 24 days, third graders missed 17 days, and fourth graders missed 31 days. In September, kindergarteners missed 13 days, first graders missed 25 days, second graders missed 21 days, third graders missed 33 days, and fourth graders missed 26 days. In October, kindergarteners missed 21 days, first graders missed 24 days, second graders missed 20 days, third graders missed 43 days, and fourth graders missed 35 days. In November, kindergarteners missed 23 days, first graders missed 20 days, second graders missed 18 days, third graders missed 27 days, and fourth graders missed 26 days.

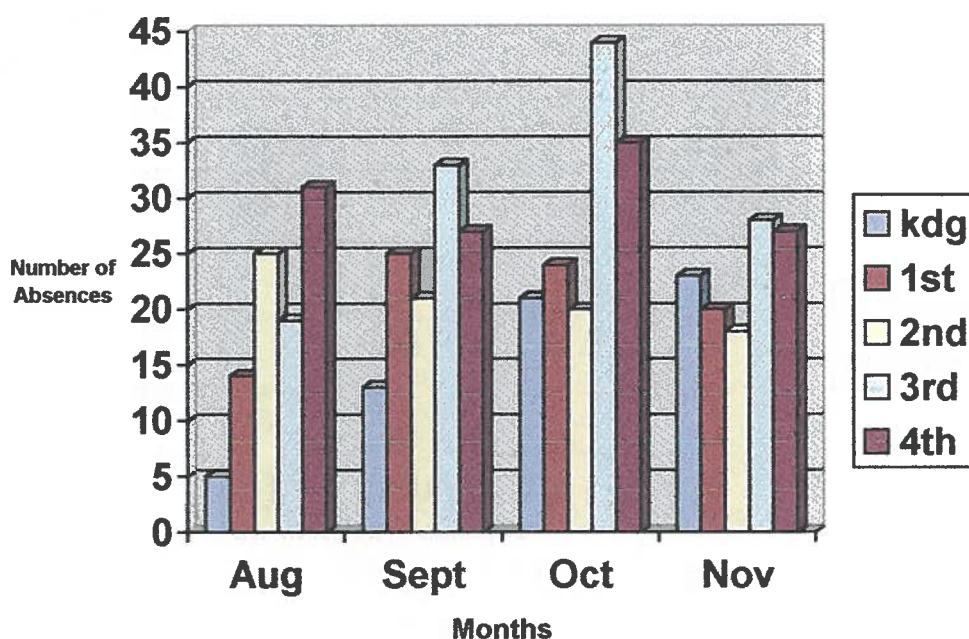


Figure 1. Monthly Absence before Intervention for 2002-2003 School Year

Figure 2 shows that before letters of noncompliance were sent home to parents with a copy of the Georgia Compulsory Attendance Law, the girls' attendance was not as good as that of the boys. In August, the boys missed 28 days and the girls missed 27 days. September data indicated that both boys and girls missed 19 days. In October, the boys missed 15 days whereas girls missed 23 days. November data showed that boys missed 27 days and girls missed 32 days.

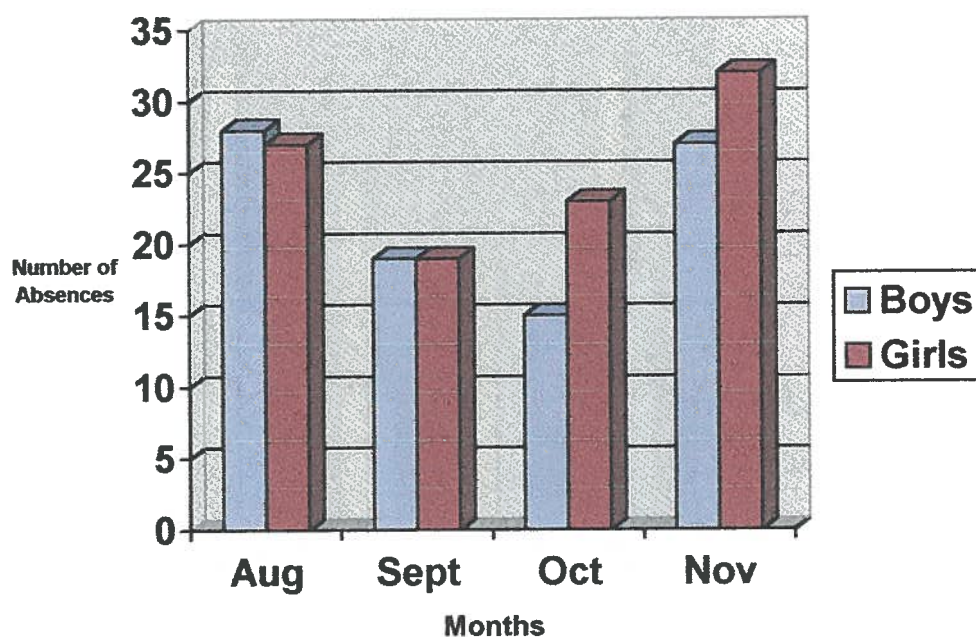


Figure 2. Monthly Absence before Intervention for 2002-2003 School Year Boys And Girls

Figure 3 shows that before letters of noncompliance were sent home to parents with a copy of the Georgia Compulsory Attendance Law, African-American students had a higher rate of absences than the other ethnic/racial groups. In the months of August and November, African-American students missed 33 days. In August, Caucasian students missed 15 days and Latinos missed 7 days. In September, African-American students missed 25 days, Caucasians students missed 10 days, and Latinos students missed 3 days. In October, African-American students missed 19 days, Caucasian students missed 13 days, and Latino students missed 6 days. In November, Caucasian students missed 18 days and Latino students missed 8 days.

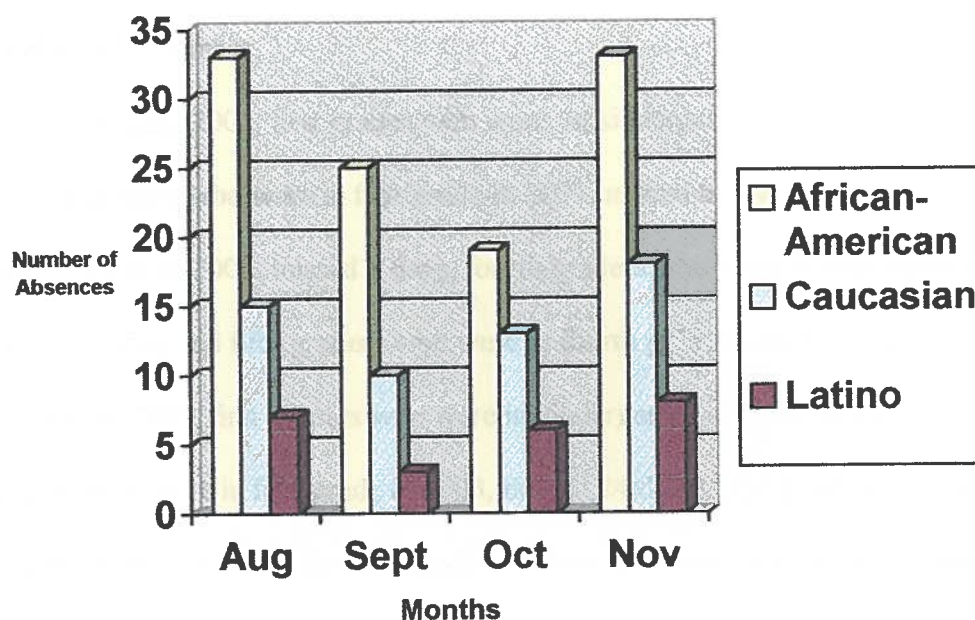


Figure 3. Monthly Absence before Intervention for 2002-2003 School Year by Ethnicity/Race

Absenteeism has been identified as a major barrier to learning. Studies have found that the problems leading to truancy exist early in the student's school experience and that the earlier one can intervene to redirect a problem, the greater the chances of success (Levine, 1984). Studies have confirmed that truancy is grossly underreported and that schools measure the children who attend, not those who are absent (Levine, 1984). The inadequate maintenance of records of children who do not attend becomes an impediment to the development of alternative support systems for these children.

Figure 4 shows that after letters of noncompliance were sent home to parents with a copy of the Georgia Compulsory Attendance Law, attendance improved. On average in

2003, students missed 9 days in August, 11 days in September, 12 days in October, and 10 days in November.

In August 2004, first graders who were in kindergarten in 2003, missed 17 days. Second graders who were in first grade in 2003, missed 6 days, third graders who were in second grade in 2003, missed 8 days, fourth graders who were in third grade in 2003, missed 3 days, and fifth graders who were in fourth grade in 2003, missed 17 days. In September 2004, first graders who were in kindergarten in 2003, missed 25 days, second graders who were in first grade in 2003, missed 24 days, third graders who were in second grade in 2003, missed 18 days, fourth graders who were in third grade in 2003, missed 9 days, and fifth graders who were in fourth grade in 2003, missed 16 days. In October 2004, first graders who were in kindergarten in 2003, missed 24 days, second graders who were in first grade in 2003, missed 13 days, third graders who were in second grade in 2003, missed 18 days, fourth graders who were in third grade in 2003, missed 17 days, and fifth graders who were in fourth grade in 2003, missed 12 days. In November 2004, first graders who were in kindergarten in 2003, missed 8 days, second graders who were in first grade in 2003, missed 9 days, third graders who were in second grade in 2003, missed 11 days, fourth graders who were in third grade in 2003, missed 12 days, and fifth graders who were in fourth grade in 2003, missed 5 days.

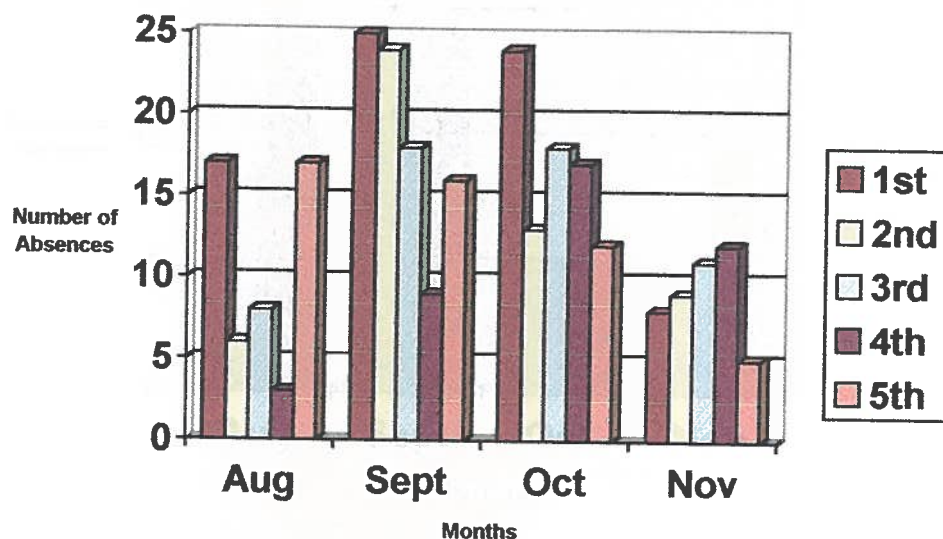


Figure 4. Monthly Absences after Intervention for 2003-2004 School Year

Figure 5 shows that after letters of noncompliance were sent home to parents with a copy of the Georgia Compulsory Attendance Law, boys' and girls' attendance showed some consistency. In August 2003, boys missed 18 days and girls missed 20 days. September data indicates that boys and girls missed 14 days each. October data indicates that boys and girls missed 5 days each, and November data shows that boys and girls missed 10 days each.

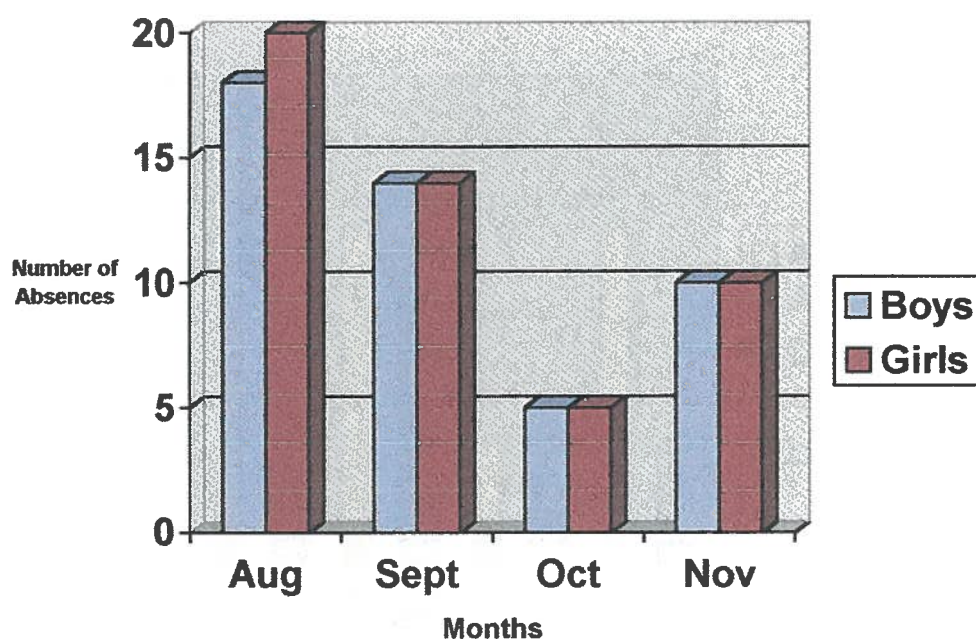


Figure 5. Monthly Absence after Intervention for 2003-2004 School Year by Boys And Girls

Figure 6 shows that after letters of noncompliance were sent home to parents with a copy of the Georgia Compulsory Attendance Law, African-American students still have a higher rate of absences than the other ethnic and racial groups. In the month of August, African-American students missed 20 days, Caucasian students missed 12 days, and Latino students missed 6 days. In September, African-American students missed 14 days, Caucasian students missed 12 days, and Latinos students missed 2 days. In October, African-American students missed 5 days, Caucasian students missed 3 days, and Latino students missed 2 days. In November, African-American students missed 14 days, Caucasian students missed 5 days, and Latino students missed 1 day.

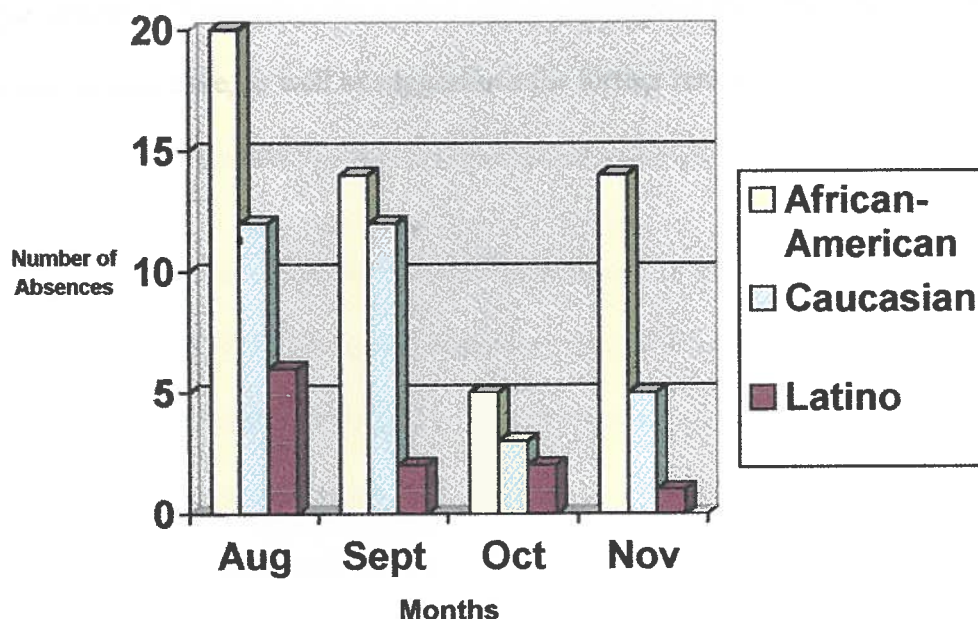


Figure 6. Monthly Absence after Intervention for 2003-2004 School Year by Ethnicity/Race

Monitoring each student's attendance on a monthly basis and sending letters of noncompliance home to parents helps in reducing truancy. The establishment and maintenance of accurate, updated records of attendance and unexcused absences would result in early parental knowledge and the development of alternative support programs (Levine, 1984). The report of the National Commission on Excellence in Education has been unequivocal in its criticism of the failure of our schools to achieve their mission but has limited its recommendations to the reform of curriculum and teacher requirements (Levine, 1984).

This chapter presented a discussion of the findings of this study. The following and final chapter will provide a discussion of the implications for social work that this, and similar studies have, as well as suggestions for further research.

CHAPTER VI

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS OF FINDINGS

The objective of this study was to determine if sending letters to parents of truant students along with the Georgia Compulsory School Attendance Law was effective in the reduction of absentees, starting with elementary school students. Based on the results, sending letters to parents along with the Georgia Compulsory Attendance Law was effective. These results will offer new direction for future research to address truancy and attendance problems. This study gave a look at the characteristics of attendance in a large urban school system, which will be useful in future research on this subject.

Like many other states, Georgia is affected by the number of truant students throughout its schools. This study may need to be repeated using a more diversified sample to add more validity. Based on the results, African- Americans and girls have the highest truancy rates. According to the months before and after, September and October had the highest truancy rates. With further research, social workers can best determine the specific reasons students may have for an outstanding amount of unexcused absences. Truancy is the first sign that a student is in trouble at home and at school. Parental involvement and school counseling can help stop truant behavior before it leads to more serious problems.

As mentioned previously, truancy is a major problem in our nation's school systems, negatively affecting the future of the youth involved. Truancy rates are growing in schools throughout the United States. Further exploration of this area will create preventative research to provide valuable insight on ways to effectively decrease truancy and to improve learning capabilities and graduation requirements for all students. Future studies should place more focus on the external variables that may lead to truancy as a means of prevention. Research in this area is necessary to develop strategies, policies, and programs to aid the school social worker in serving students, teachers, and parents who are affected by truancy, and to ensure that the use of social workers in this field is sustained.

APPENDIX A

SCHOOL SOCIAL WORKER REFERRAL FORM

DISTRIBUTION

White - School Social Worker
Yellow - School Social Worker
Pink - Coordinator
Goldenrod - School

ATLANTA PUBLIC SCHOOLS

SCHOOL SOCIAL WORKER REFERRAL FORM

FOR OFFICE USE ONLY

Date Received _____

First Contact _____

Student Name _____ I.D. Number/ S.S. Number _____ Date of Birth _____

School _____ Grade/Sec. _____ HR# _____ Sex: M _____ F _____

Parent/Guardian _____

Address _____

Home Phone _____ Business Phone _____

PROBLEM AS SEEN BY REFERRING PERSON: (If attendance, please attach a copy of student's attendance card)
EXPLAIN PROBLEMS BRIEFLY AND CORRECTIVE STEPS TAKEN BY SCHOOL PERSONNEL:

Approved by Principal or Designee _____ Title _____

SOCIAL WORKER'S REPORT:

CASE STATUS

Continued _____

Closed _____

Revised 8/97
#67205

Social Worker _____

Case Code _____

Date _____

APPENDIX B

LETTER TO PARENT



ATLANTA PUBLIC SCHOOLS

BENTEN
ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
200 CASANOVA STREET, S
ATLANTA, GEORGIA 30311
CHRISTIANA OTUWA
PRINCIPAL
(404) 624-2000
FAX (404) 624-2013

August 29, 2003

Dear Parent:

One of the goals of Benteen Elementary for the 2003-2004 school year is to increase our school attendance. We are going to need your help in order to achieve this goal. Your child, _____ was absent from school _____ days last school year.

Your child's attendance will be closely monitored this year. A note from the parent or guardian is required whenever a student is absent or tardy. The note must be sent to your child's homeroom teacher. Continued unexcused absences and tardiness will result in an educational neglect complaint being filed in Fulton County Juvenile Court.

If you have questions or would like to discuss your child's attendance, please call me at Benteen Elementary School at the above number. Enclosed is a copy of excerpts from the Georgia Compulsory School Attendance Law. Also listed below are reasons for an excused absence:


1. When personally ill and when attendance would endanger their health or the health of others.
2. When in the immediate family there is a serious illness or death, which would reasonably necessitate absence from school.
3. On special and recognized religious holidays observed by their faith.
4. When prevented due to conditions rendering school attendance impossible or hazardous to their health and safety.

Please help Benteen achieve it's attendance goal and help your child achieve academic success this year by being present and on time each day.

Sincerely,

Winifred Searles, MSW
School Social Worker

Enclosure (1)

Approved: 
Christiana Otuwa, Principal

APPENDIX C

GEORGIA COMPULSORY ATTENDANCE LAW

EXCERPTS FROM GEORGIA LAW REGARDING THE GEORGIA COMPULSORY SCHOOL ATTENDANCE LAW (32-21)

Every parent, guardian, or person residing within the state having control or charge of any child or children between their seventh and sixteenth birthdays shall enroll and send such child or children to a public school, private school, or a home study program.

CODE SECTION 20-2-690.1

Any parent or guardian who fails to enroll and send his/her child to one of the three alternative educational programs specified above shall, upon conviction, be guilty of a misdemeanor. These individuals will be subject to a fine not to exceed \$100.00 or imprisonment not to exceed 30 days or both, at the discretion of the court having jurisdiction. Each day's absence from school in violation of this CODE SECTION shall constitute a separate offense.

Local school superintendents shall have the authority to enforce this law as it relates to private school and home study programs. Visiting teacher and attendance officers shall have the authority as it relates to public schools. (IN THE ATLANTA SCHOOLS, THE SCHOOL SOCIAL WORKER IS THE VISITING TEACHER).

CODE SECTION 20-2-701

Visiting teachers and attendance officers shall, after providing written notice to the parent or guardian of the child, report to the juvenile court or other court having jurisdiction, any child who is absent from public school without an approved excuse.

APPENDIX D

ATLANTA PUBLIC SCHOOLS APPROVAL LETTER



ATLANTA PUBLIC SCHOOLS

RESEARCH, PLANNING AND
ACCOUNTABILITY DEPARTMENT
222 FIFTH STREET, S.W.
ATLANTA, GEORGIA 30336

October 22, 2003

404-827-8001
FAX (404) 827-8362

Our Focus... Student Success


Ms. JBI Forniss
12 Chappell Road, S.W.
Atlanta, Georgia 30314

Dear Ms. Forniss:

Your request to conduct research within the Atlanta Public Schools (APS) was reviewed by the Research Screening Committee in accordance with the guidelines. Your research study entitled "Truancy and the Georgia Compulsory School Attendance Law" was approved under the following conditions:

1. Your study is confined in APS to Parkside, Benten, and D.H. Stanton Elementary Schools. You must obtain the approvals of the principals, Ms. Danielle Battle, Dr. Christiana Otwa, and Dr. Willie Davenport, prior to beginning your research study. Principals have the final approval on whether research studies are conducted in their schools. If any of the principals of the schools selected for your study do not approve of your research or do not believe that it is in the best interest of their schools to participate, you may select a comparable APS elementary school as a replacement with the principal's approval.
2. Your research design involves contacting the social workers for each of the three selected schools and obtaining data related to truancy. You plan to examine the Social Worker Referral Forms and the absences as reported on the SASI system. Your access to these data is a valid part of your work-related activities within an authorized Field Practicum in the Social Work Services Department of APS. You must maintain contact with Ms. Juliet Stovall, APS Coordinator of Social Work Services (404-335-2081) throughout the duration of your study.
3. Students will not be directly involved in your research study. Individual student data from Social Worker Referral Forms and SASI must be maintained in blind or aggregate format adhering to legal guidelines on confidentiality and access to identifiable student data.
4. Activities related to your research study must not interfere with the ongoing instructional program or with the state and local testing programs.
5. The data collection phase of your research study must be completed by the end of the 2003-2004 year.
6. The confidentiality of students, teachers, social workers, other APS staff members, the schools, and the school system must be ensured. Pseudonyms for people and the schools, as well as references to APS as "a large urban school system," are required in the title and text of your final report before publication or presentation outside of APS.
7. APS staff members can participate in your research study only on a voluntary basis.
8. If changes are made in the research design or in the instruments used, you must notify the Department of Research, Planning, and Accountability prior to beginning your study.

This letter serves as official notification of the approval of your proposed research study, pending the above conditions. Remember that a copy of the results of your completed study must be submitted to the Department of Research, Planning, and Accountability. Please contact me at (404) 827-8186 or nemmons@atlanta.k12.ga.us if I can be of further assistance.

Sincerely,

Nancy J. Emmons, Ph.D.
Research Associate

NJE: sm - #3859

cc: Dr. Sharron Hunt
Dr. Christiana Otwa
Ms. Danielle Battle
Dr. Willie Davenport
Ms. Juliet Stovall

For school system directory information, dial 404.827.8000. The Atlanta Public School System does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, age, national origin, disability, veteran status, marital status, or sexual orientation in any of its employment positions, educational programs, services or activities. For additional information about nondiscrimination provisions, please contact the Office of Internal Relations, 2700 Peachtree Road, N.W., Atlanta, Georgia 30328, 404.253.2825/1777.

APPENDIX E

SITE APPROVAL LETTER



Our Focus... Student Success

ATLANTA PUBLIC SCHOOLS

**BENTEN
ELEMENTARY SCHOOL**
200 CASANOVA STREET, S.E.
ATLANTA, GEORGIA 30315
DR. CHRISTIANA OTUWA
Principal
(404) 624-2000
Fax (404) 624-2013

November 18, 2003

Ms. Jill Forniss
Social Work Intern
Clark Atlanta University
12 Chappell Road, SW
Atlanta, GA 30314

Dear Ms. Forniss:

I have received and reviewed your proposal paper that outlines that research that you wish to conduct at Benteen Elementary. After thorough review of your intended work, you are granted approval to continue your research at Benteen using pseudonyms for children.

If you encounter any problems or concerns, please do not hesitate to alert me to them.

Sincerely,

Christina Otuwa, PhD
Principal

CO:gks



ATLANTA PUBLIC SCHOOLS

DANIEL H. STANTON
ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
970 MARTIN STREET, S.E.
ATLANTA, GEORGIA 30315

WILLIE N. DAVENPORT, PH.D.

(404) 624-2084
FAX (404) 624-2166

wdavenport@atlanta.k12.ga.us

November 18, 2003

Ms. Jill Forniss, Social Worker Intern
CLARK ATLANTA UNIVERSITY
12 Chappell Road, SW
Atlanta, GA 30314

Dear Ms. Forniss:

I have received and reviewed your proposal paper that outlines the research that you wish to conduct at D. H. Stanton Elementary. After thorough review of your intended work, you are granted approval to continue your research at D. H. Stanton using pseudonyms for the children.

If you encountered any problems or concerns, please do not hesitate to alert me to them.

Sincerely,

Willie N. Davenport
Dr. Willie N. Davenport, Principal
D. H. STANTON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

WND/dfl



ATLANTA PUBLIC SCHOOLS

PARKSIDE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
686 MERCER STREET, S.E.
ATLANTA, GEORGIA 30312

DANIELLE BATTLE
PRINCIPAL

(404) 624-2958
FAX (404) 624-2955

November 18, 2003

Ms. Jill Forniss
Social Work Intern
Clark Atlanta University
12 Chappell Road, SW
Atlanta, Georgia 30314

Dear Ms. Forniss,

I have received and reviewed your proposal paper that outlines the research that you wish to conduct at Parkside Elementary. After thorough review of your intended work, you are granted approval to continue your research at Parkside using pseudonyms for the children.

If you encounter any problems or concerns, please do not hesitate to alert me to them.

Sincerely,

Danielle S. Battle

Danielle S. Battle
Principal

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